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ABSTRACT

Several conditions, identified by Cambourne (1988) as contributing to children becoming successful language users, have been simulated in Australian schools in order for children to feel self-assured in mastering writing and reading just as these conditions have promoted the developmental process of talking in the home. The conditions are: immersion, demonstration, expectations, responsibility, approximation, use (practice), and response. This paper shows how language at home is learned according to the Cambourne model and examines how Australian schools have implemented the model in teaching reading and writing. It further demonstrates how conventional American schools have failed to follow this literacy model. Implications for literacy training are discussed. Contains 12 references. (LB)

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Bringing Forth the Joy of Literacy: What Australia Has Shared with Us

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Running Head: BRINGING FORTH LITERACY

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Bringing Forth the Joy of Literacy:
What Australia Has Shared with Us

Most people think that language learning is learning to talk, but language learning is much more than learning to talk. It is learning to read and write. Most teachers assume that the written forms of language are different from the oral forms. They think that the written form is more complex and abstract, and, therefore, should be taught differently. Cambourne (1988), however, believes that there are certain conditions that are necessary for the learning of language.

Teachers can use the shared reading experience, journal writing, partner reading, daily news and other elements of whole language instruction, but underlying these language arts methods, should be principles or conditions that teachers and administrators understand and promote in their classrooms as they use instruction in whole language. In Australia, a country in which it is estimated by professionals that over 80% of the teachers are trained in whole language, there is a growing saturation of knowledge with the conditions that promote literacy. One model developed by an Australian (Cambourne, 1988) was seen in many lesson

plan books in Australian schools as well as in the Language Arts Philosophies written by teachers in certain Australian schools. Conditions that promote literacy need to be a part of the teacher's knowledge base as well as in his or her daily planning.

Cambourne (1988) has identified a number of conditions which contribute to children becoming successful language users. These conditions have been simulated in Australian schools in order for children to feel self-assured in mastering writing and reading just as these conditions have promoted the developmental process of talking in the home. This paper will:

1) show how language at home is learned according to the Cambourne model.
2) examine how Australian schools have implemented this model in teaching reading and writing.
3) demonstrate how conventional American schools have failed to follow this literacy model.
4) state implications of these contrasting views for literacy training.

Condition One: Immersion

Immersion Language Development at Home

From the moment a child is born, he or she is saturated with language. Mother and Father talk with the child and to each other. The child hears people talking to each other. As a result of the bombardment with language, he learns to talk.

Immersion in Reading and Writing in Australia

When the child came to school in Australia, the child was surrounded by an environment full of visual and auditory stimulation. The literacy materials included such items as: poems, songs, labels, advertisements, graphs, recipes, charts, and published writing of children.

Developmentally appropriate literacy materials.

Upon taking a close observation of these literacy items, one saw that generally these materials have developmentally appropriate messages that were within the experiential background of the children in Australia. For instance, there were photographs and a language experience story about a brunch children had planned in a first grade class at Yarrálumla in Canberra, the capital of Australia. The charts in the rooms, generally, were personally related to the child,

the child's needs or interests. As an example, there were hair color charts, name labels, names for grandma charts, names for grandpa charts, and playground equipment charts.

In addition to being a part of their experiential background, the charts showed evidence of concreteness in the messages. Children did not just see words on a page. The concreteness was seen in a Big Book called McDonald's at Camp Hill School in Bendigo, Victoria. The class had obviously visited McDonald's restaurant, had photographs of McDonald's, drawings of the items on the McDonald's menu and at the end of the book there were only words which were items on the menu.

The utility of the signs was evident in a label like "Songs We Like to Sing Again and Again" which was displayed on charts of songs they like to sing in a first grade class at Yarrálumla School in Canberra the capital. Other charts with the title of the song and the symbol representing the song were used at Trinity Beach Preschool in Cairns, Queensland.

The literacy materials were also related to the literature they were studying. Many versions of the Big Books, enlarged texts with predictable story and image patterns, and nursery rhymes were seen throughout

the rnoms. Sometimes only a word would be changed such as "Eeny meanie minnie moon, catch a fellow by a spoon." The materials were all developmentally appropriate, in that they were part of the children's personal, concrete and/or functional experiences.

Big Books and Shared Reading. The stories in the Big Books were carefully chosen for: predictable rhyme or predictable words; cumulative predictable rhyme or words; or a common cultural theme such as days of the week or numbers. During the Big Book experience the whole class of children sat on the floor in view of the Big Book which is usually on a chart stand. The teacher usually asked the children questions in order to help them to predict what will happen before she read the story. The teacher then read the story and the children may chime in. There was a one-to-one correspondence between the spoken word and the written word when the teacher used the pointer to visually connect the spoken word with the written word. Other methods for using the Big Book are found in Holdaway (1979).

After the large group instruction, usually small groups were formed of heterogeneously grouped children. One group of five might be at the listening post or

listening center, listening to a small version of the Big Book that was initially read by the teacher in the large group instruction. Another group of five might be writing stories about the Big Book or writing in their journals about a topic they chose to write about. The children were encouraged to share their writing with others. A third group might be doing a parallel story in which the original Big Book Story used with the whole class is changed to a similar pattern of the Big Book Story with different words. For example, in To Town by Cowley (1983), a book about going to town in a bulldozer, a fire-engine, a vintage car, a helicopter, etc., the teacher had the children write a story using the samé structure but different vehicles or she might have the children go to the beach in various vehicles. Another group consisted of a partner reading aloud, a type of reading in which the children share in picture reading, memorized texts or oral reading of the story with each other. The type of reading depended on the developmental level of the child. All developmental stages of reading were accepted and children were encouraged to help and encourage each other.

Put It Into Writing. Australian schools emphasized the theme "Put It In Writing." The teachers wrote letters to children, children wrote letters to each other, and books were written by children. Some of the books were published by the Aborigine children of the Parramatta State School. The reading material in these books reflected the interests and background of the Aborigine children's culture.

Reading and Writing in Conventional Classrooms in the United States

Developmentally Inappropriate Literacy Materials. Generally, the U.S. classrooms do not have as many literacy materials that are developmentally appropriate, or that fit the criteria of being part of the child's experiential background, concrete, and functional.

The literacy materials in conventional U.S. classrooms are based around the basal stories, which are traditional stories that have adapted versions of fine literature and thereby are often dull and uninteresting. Much of the language in the basals is not related to the child's real speaking world. Reading and writing materials show evidence of skill development in recognizing single letters, sounding out

words, and copying correct letter formation of letters on a printed line. Typically in U.S. classrooms children are observed learning alphabet letters and sounds--not listening, reading, and writing stories.

Teachers in U.S. kindergarten classrooms spend a large part of the day going over the numbers, days of week, days of month, and months in the year. Even though this is social and cultural knowledge that is important to know, because of the child's confusion about class inclusion or how these terms are related, strong emphasis with commercially made materials is probably not appropriate to the child's experiential background. In order to understand the calendar, the child should understand one-on-one correspondence, numbers, how a day fits into a week, a week fits into a month, and a month fits into a year. In kindergarten the calendar should be used only when it has personal meaning for the child and this should be done with concrete items within their experiential background.

Time Off Task. In comparing American with Australian children, American children spend far less actual time reading during language arts/reading sessions. The basal stories in America are shorter in length with very controlled vocabulary as compared to

the Big Books of Australia. After children read the basals, they finish a worksheet with concepts emphasized in the basal text. This workbook page is usually short and very skill oriented. The children also finish their group seatwork which has a skill oriented emphasis. The Big Book Story in Australia Has more content than the basal text and usually more motivating with predictable patterns. After the Big Book is shared, extension activities for the "down under" children included reading at a listening post, writing and sending journal articles, sharing reading with other children and teachers, and the development of language arts activities with the teacher. These activities gave the child many more experiences in language arts and reading than the conventional basal methods. The Australian schools have approximately four times as much available print during the reading/language arts time than American schools. American schools are literally starved for print--during reading time.

Lack of Writing. Writing is being emphasized more in U.S. schools but not to the extent that it is in Australian schools. Very little evidence is displayed in American schools of the forms of writing that were

found in Australian schools. Forms of writing that were witnessed in Australian schools included: personal letters, sensory impressions of art, journals, advertisements, invitations, cartoons, graphs, greeting cards, recipes, and jokes.

Implications

Research indicates that there is an extremely high correlation between the quantity of material read in a beginning reading program and the level of success or failure in later reading (Clay, 1967). These research findings suggest American schools need to re-examine how they can best serve the children in learning to read and write.

Gambrell (1986) found in a study of first, second and third graders that rarely are students given the opportunity to engage in silent or oral reading of a sustained nature. She felt there should be increased awareness of how little time children in U.S. classrooms spend in contextual reading and that the sporadic teaching of reading skills in American schools suggests that reading is not considered a modelled activity which requires sustained concentration.

In addition, a high relationship has been found between knowledge of writing on entry to school and the

ability to read at 8 years (Mason, 1980). If this is true, then forms of writing should be emphasized. The learners who think of themselves as writers will read differently. They will pay attention to the form and style and try to learn more from them. If someone has been trained in ballet and they go to see a professional ballet company, they will learn more from the performance. This is true of the writer. The writer will pay much more attention to reading if he is trained in the styles and form of language.

Condition Two: Demonstration

Demonstration of Language Development at Home

Parents demonstrate the use of language by talking about tying the child's shoes as they tie the child's shoes or using language in its many functions in order to fulfill needs, control, relate, etc. These demonstrations are frequent and natural for both parent and child.

Demonstration of Reading and Writing in Australia

Demonstrations by the teacher were seen in Australian schools which helped shape the behavior of children in the language arts. The teacher reads aloud in the beginning stage of the Big Book. She reads Mrs. Wishy Washy from the Story Box (Wright) using a very

controlling tone and even dramatizes the appearance of being authoritarian. The expressive behavior while reading a Big Book is reflected in the children's expressive behavior. In Mrs. Wishy Washy, the teacher screams, "Just look at you!" and she reads this in a bossy voice. The children reread practicing their bossy voices.

The teacher models writing by using the many forms of written language: personal letters, journals, invitations, greeting cards, recipes, and other forms. There were many examples of teachers writing personal letters to students and students replying to these letters.

The Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR) showed how teachers modelled silent reading along with the children. The teacher read a book while the students read books. The Big Book demonstration, the writing, and the USSR have shown that the teachers in Australia have communicated the values of reading and writing by the actual reading and writing they do.

Demonstration of Reading and Writing in Conventional Classroom in the United States

Actual modelling of reading and writing in the traditional U.S. class is limited to storyreading to

children and writing assignments on the board and on charts. The American teacher does not usually model reading in the basal nor does she use writing in its many different forms.

Implications. If in fact teachers so value reading and writing, then the teachers should be modelling reading and writing. Values are qualities or beliefs that are desirable or worthwhile. People with high self esteem generally are willing to affirm their values and behave in ways that are consistent with them. If reading and writing are values held by teachers, should they not be able to express them more frequently in the classroom? How is this affecting the self esteem of teachers?

Condition Three: Expectations

Parents' Expectations of Language at Home

Most parents expect their children to talk. What parent does not expect this and look forward to each new word said by the child?

Australian Teachers' Expectations in Reading and Writing

It was expected that children will learn to read and write in Australia. Children were not generally grouped in wombats, kangaroos, and platypuses groups as one might assume based on the American system of

ability grouping. A group has a way of labeling children as excellent, average, or poor readers. In Australia it was important to convey the message that all children can read and that they should read at their own pace. Reading was not presented as something hard to do or something to put red marks on.

There is no such word as failure; however, there were miscues. For instance, when students read, they quite frequently said words that were different from those in the book. Many times students were comprehending what is read. An example of a miscue was: "She is going home to play" and the child says "She is going to the house to play." The child was understanding the text even though the text was not read verbatim. Comprehension of the text was of paramount importance in Australia--not just reading the correct word. Children were rewarded for predicting and understanding.

Children were encouraged to experiment in writing and all other forms of expression--drama, music, dance, and art. The classroom in Australia was an openly expressive classroom. In order for these children to open up and share, they needed to feel a part of the classroom community. The teacher created a supportive

environment for communication and she prominently displayed the work of the children.

The teacher used prewriting or introductory activities to stimulate writing. These prewriting activities helped foster community, clarify thoughts, and help children talk with one another. This helps create an expectation that they can accomplish the task of writing.

American Teachers' Expectations in Reading and Writing

Children in many U.S. schools are expected to pass tests at the end of reading unit and standardized reading tests. These tests determine what reading group the children will be placed in. Ordinarily, American teachers keep children in the redbird, bluebird, and yellowbird reading groups all year. They are labeled as high, average, and low readers and rarely are the expectations of teachers ever changed for the children assigned to reading in these groups.

Such children are fearful of making mistakes in reading and they do not tend to predict as much as Australian children. Teachers in the U.S. expect them to sound out many of the words if they do not understand the words. Also, there is not as much use of contextual clues, or getting the meaning from text.

Children's writing in U.S. schools is not as expressive as it is in Australian schools. Even though invented spelling is accepted, children are much more concerned with the product than the process and the teacher is generally not trained in the conference approach to teaching writing which involves focusing on the elaboration of content and form.

Implications

The Pygmalion Effect (1968) or self-fulfilling prophecy, may be responsible for the outstanding achievement of high groups. Paradoxically, the self-fulfilling prophecy could also be responsible for the huge amount of illiterate adults who were placed in the low reading groups as children. Children in U.S. schools do not need to be branded and assigned to a reading group because of a test. This causes low expectations. Children should be expected to read and write at their developmental level and because of sudden growth spurts, there should be more flexibility in grouping.

If children are expected to read and write, they will feel free to self-correct or self-regulate. Clay (1980) found that there was a high correlation between successful self-correction or self-regulation and later

success or failure in reading. Without feeling in control, children will not feel independent and be able to self-correct. In traditional methods, children are not allowed to make decisions. In the U.S. teachers point out errors and children attempt to correct them. Children are not allowed to self-correct. It is assumed that independence reading is a goal rather than a process.

Condition Four: Responsibility

Responsibility for Language Development at Home

There are no behavioral objectives used for teaching language by parents to children. The child decides what language to master. He takes the responsibility for his language and he enjoys it.

Responsibility for Reading and Writing in Australia

Taking over control of their own reading and writing was a natural function of children in Australia. It was made explicit that the children learn best by doing something on their own. Children were constantly reading and writing without teacher direction.

There were more choices in the room for children. They had choices in what to write about in journals, what to read about in the reading conference with the

teacher and what to read about in shared reading with each other as well as what learning centers to choose to enter.

It was particularly interesting to see the methods used in teaching spelling in several Australian schools. The teacher would find a few words the child had over-generalized and point out that they were irregular patterns in spelling. The teacher would make a list and let children learn them using a method in which children look, write and check their work with the use of a flap or cover. For example, the word "cride" could be an overgeneralization of an irregular spelling pattern (cried). The child has learned the generalization that a long i can have a silent e at the end. Similarly, the child who says, "I have two foots" has overgeneralized the plural s to an irregular plural pattern.

Responsibility for Reading and Writing in America

In America, the teacher is the stimulus for children learning skills in reading. If teaching of skills is paramount, the school leaves little space for the child to learn to read or write like he does on similar tasks outside of school. If a child makes a mistake in reading or writing, he is open to the

teacher's criticism and can develop an aversion for reading and writing. He associates reading and writing with fear and is "turned off" from reading.

When reading or writing is taught only because it is required to be taught, as is the case in some American schools, the child is distracted from understanding what reading and writing really are and taking responsibility for personal learning. Spelling in America is taught according to rules that are arbitrarily established by the required textbook adapted--not according to the developmental needs of the child.

Implications

Research has time and time again mentioned the importance of empowerment--for the child and the teacher. Goodman (1986) says that "schools must face the bitter fact that children tend to become literate and succeed in school in proportion to the amount of power to use their literacy they and their families possess" (p. 10).

Even the work world is emphasizing responsibility on the part of workers in our technological age as opposed to blind obedience that had been emphasized in the past. Because of the development of high

technology, white collar workers now outnumber blue collar workers. Employers increasingly need men and women who accept responsibility, who understand how their work dovetails that of others, who can handle even larger tasks, who adapt swiftly to changed circumstances, and who are sensitively tuned in to the people around them (Toffler, 1980).

Peters and Waterman (1982) found in studying highly productive and profitable companies that workers performed better when they were given control over their destinies. Nowicki and Strickland (1973) found that children's assumptions about the locus of control over their lives have become stable by the third grade. In other words, the perceived locus of control, or the belief about one's power and control, is generally a stable characteristic. If empowerment is so important, then why should American schools still be treating children like rats fed with pellets?

Condition Five: Approximation

Rewarding Approximation of Languages at Home

Baby talk is rewarded and parents consider it meaningful. Parents reward children for being close--not just right. "A juice," says the child. "So you want more juice," says the mother. This is rewarding a

close approximation of behavior. "You left out the subject and you should say, "I want more juice." This is an example of how one should not be talking to children because it does not reward approximation.

Rewarding Approximations of Reading/Writing at School

Since thinking is valued, the process of reading and writing is rewarded. Therefore, approximations of reading, writing and spelling are rewarded along the way to the finished product. There is a reading, writing, spelling process that is important. Prediction is an important part of reading and mistakes are made when predictions are made. Children in Australia probably make more mistakes in reading words than American children. They probably comprehend more though.

Rewarding Approximations of Reading/Writing in American Schools

American schools do not promote approximation. They promote right answers and multiple choice items which sometimes prevent the teacher from understanding the child's thinking.

Implications

The whole system of evaluation of reading and writing in the U.S. should be reconsidered in American

schools. Evaluation should be ongoing and there should be many informal assessments made rather than standardized or unit tests. A close observation of children should be made of children's reading and writing so that close approximations of the reading and writing behavior can be rewarded.

Condition Six: Use (Practice)

Language Use at Home

Children need time to practice oral language at home. They need people to listen and people to respond to their verbal efforts. Parents of competent children take the time to hear and reply. If a visitor comes to the home, a verbal child will converse with the visitor. An example of this would be the little three year old who goes to nursery school for the first day, talks for one hour about her day at school, her many friends, and her teacher to a friend of the child's mother.

Reading and Writing Practice in the Australian School

The practice time for reading and writing was extremely high and more effective in Australia. This was especially true after the Big Book presentation. The classes had busy time in which they were happily practicing reading and writing in small groups.

The children in Australia had many conferences, in which they communicate, sometimes in a group conference and sometimes individually. This could be carried out in a writing conference in which the teacher interacts with the child concerning a small problem that may be hindering the child's writing. The reading conference gives the child the opportunity to ask questions, attend to the character, plot, setting, and style of the story he has chosen to read.

The group conference involved a small group of children who discussed the context, direction, and expression of drafts. In the group conference there were a number of questions asked by the teacher such as: What's your favorite part of your story? What do you think you will do next? What do you need help with? Can you think of a different way to say this?

Publishing of books was another way of practicing writing in Australia. The Aborigine children of North Queensland have had many of their books published. They revised and wrote many drafts before the books were made public. The children kept these books in their class libraries.

Children approached visitors with their books and writing. They immediately wanted to share their

favorite literature and writings with adults. This was a common occurrence in Australia.

Reading and Writing Practice in American Schools

Children in American schools are practicing reading and writing by using skills that are arbitrarily chosen by the teacher. Children have lost the love of beautiful literature which enhances the love of reading and writing. The basal stories, which are short and controlled, are adapted versions of the original stories, which were once rich in imagery. Children need more practice in what should come naturally--reading and writing timely and interesting stories.

The children in traditional U.S. schools hardly ever want to share a story with another child or with a visitor to the school. Sharing is almost unheard of in conventionally taught classrooms. Quiet children are rewarded in these classrooms while children who talk or share good literature are punished.

Implications

Practice is important in any field of endeavor. Which form of practice is the most efficient for reading and writing? The mechanical practice of skills or the practice of the real thing? Why is reading

aloud to a child or to a visitor a practice that is not rewarded?

Condition Seven: Response

Response to Language Development at Home

"Look, Mother. Smash snake." (Another child has just smashed the clay snake.) Mother: "Oh, too bad. John smashed the snake." (Mother emphasizes the expansion of the child's structure.) This is responding to the child in a way that enhances language.

Response to Reading/Writing at School in Australia

Teachers respond in order to help the student with information that is helpful to the child's growing syntactic knowledge. Interaction was spontaneous and sometimes required skill in interrupting the message. In one class the following conversation took place.

Child: "Look, pie."

Teacher: "Oh, you made a . . . ?

Child: "Pie"

Teacher: "You made a delicious strawberry pie?"

In this example the teacher prompted for words and then repeats the words in a mature structure. The feedback helps clarify thinking.

Response to Reading/Writing in American Schools

The responses teachers make in American schools sometimes are threatening and more directly related to correcting a mistake. They do not generally focus on gaps in the skills and try to extend thinking by asking "How else could you read or write this?" Curriculum plans should take into account the time necessary to redirect the thinking of the child.

Implications

Informed responding and feedback should be a very important part of teacher training in America. Teachers are normally taught positive feedback techniques but not techniques emphasizing relevancy, appropriateness, timeliness, and availability in a non-threatening environment. These concepts are important for teachers to use (Cambourne, 1988).

Concluding Remarks

In closing, a parable may be appropriate. There were two men who applied for a job in a factory. One, an Australian farmer, was asked the question, "If there are fifty sheep in a pen and five were sent out to pasture, how many were left?" The farmer said zero. Needless to say, the plant manager did not give the farmer the job because he thought he could not

subtract. The farmer, however, knew that if five sheep were sent out to pasture, then all the sheep would go. He knew the nature of sheep. The Aussie saw the problem at a deeper level.

There are paradoxes in our world and in early literacy. We need to look beyond multiple choice questions, basals, and worksheets and thus create conditions that promote joyful and early literacy. Australia is doing just that!

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